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**Culturally and linguistically diverse children's  
and families' experiences of participation and  
inclusion in Finnish early childhood education  
and care**

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# Acknowledgements

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In Helsinki, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
Anna-Leena Lastikka

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## List of original publications

(I) Lastikka, A-L. & Lipponen, L. (2016). Immigrant parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 18(3), 75–94.

(II) Lastikka, A-L. & Kangas, J. (2017). Ethical Reflections on Interviewing Young Children: Opportunities and Challenges for Promoting Children's Inclusion and Participation. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 11(1), 85–110.

(III) Arvola, O., Lastikka, A-L. & Reunamo, J. (2017). Increasing Immigrant Children's Participation in the Finnish Early Childhood Education Context. *The European Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 20(3), 2538–2548.



# 1 Introduction

*“Easy to face, because we know each other. It is good to educate each other”.* This quotation is from a mother who was interviewed as part of this study that explores culturally and linguistically diverse children’s and families’ experiences of participation and inclusion in the Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. The aim is to identify and develop inclusive practices and pedagogy in the Finnish ECEC services through considering culturally and linguistically diverse children’s and their families’ perspectives. The quote describes well my starting point for this study: I see that listening and learning from each other’s experiences in daily life helps to understand the world from the other person’s perspective and is a root for inclusion, participation and diversity.

In this study, the term ‘culturally and linguistically diverse children and families’ refers to people who are living in Finland but born elsewhere as well as Finland-born or children who live in Finland but have been born elsewhere with at least one migrant parent. The research data of this study consists of persons, who belong to several different nationalities or ethnic groups. I argue the chosen term identifies better the cultural and linguistic diversity of current Finnish society and does not refer to people lacking the ability to speak Finnish (see also Sawrikar & Katz, 2009). Additionally, the term *families* is used versus *parents*, because it encompasses better the diversity of families living in today’s world and does not exclude children living with persons other than their parents.

One underlying premise of this study is that to feel included, children and families of cultural and linguistic diversity may need extra support, encouragement, resources or advocacy that take into account their experiences, perspectives and wishes (e.g., Seaman et al., 2006). In Finland, cultural and linguistic uniformity is past and the diversity of families in the Finnish ECEC services is increasing as the number of migrant children in ECEC is growing (Hiekkavuo & Forsell, 2018). However, the research on culturally and linguistically diverse children’s and families’ perspectives is scarce (e.g., Ansala, Hämäläinen & Sarvimäki, 2014; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Niemelä, 2015; Ojala, 2010; Paavola, 2017), and concerns about immigrant children’s inequality and segregation have been raised (Blakeslee, 2015). Moreover, the need for teachers’ intercultural competencies has been acknowledged (Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). Therefore, this study is required and will answer this need. Next, I will discuss the background and process, as well as the focus and objectives of this study.

## **1.1 The background of the study: from exclusion towards participation and inclusion**

In 2010, the topic of this study began to evolve as I became interested in studying the perspectives of children, parents and teachers on their daily lives in the Finnish ECEC services in a multicultural context in order to find the factors preventing exclusion and supporting inclusion. During that time, social and educational exclusion was a topical issue both internationally and nationally. The European Union (EU) had launched the Europe 2020 Strategy with five objectives of which two, education and social inclusion, related to my research (European Commission, 2010). In relation to exclusion and ECEC, the objective meant that there should be access to quality ECEC services that would give all children the best chances in life, regardless of their social background (European Commission, 2011). In Finland, the department of teacher education at the University of Helsinki became involved in a large EU project called INCLUD-ED during 2006–2011. I was working in this project, which offered me a chance to produce the research data for this study and to find answers to questions on how to reduce inequalities and marginalisation, as well as to foster educational and social inclusion already in early childhood education (Flecha, 2015).

When proceeding with this study, I realized that the possible risks in early childhood education leading to exclusion in the Finnish ECEC context were already rather well-known: withdrawn children in day care have difficulties with social skills, peer group acceptance and teacher-child relationships that in turn might be a risk factor for exclusion. Furthermore, children's multiple problems in their peer relations could be a risk factor for dropping out of positive networks (Laine et al., 2010). Naturally, it cannot be denied that the research on risk factors has helped in understanding that intervention and prevention are important in tackling exclusion and promoting the well-being of children and families. However, when studying more closely different research, it appeared that risk factors had been more emphasized than positive factors and possibilities for growth and change (see also Murray, 2003). Additionally, Niemelä (2015), who did his doctoral thesis based on the INCLUD-ED research data found that parents and children were not able to make their voices heard sufficiently and that there was a lack of resources. The most supportive practice for inclusion was co-operation. When proceeding with the research, I became intrigued by the social inclusion, pedagogy of diversity and co-operation between ECEC personnel and culturally and linguistically diverse families and wanted to focus on these.

Therefore, I began to change direction from social and educational exclusion towards community partnerships, participation, involvement and agency. The idea from Peace (2001) was interesting: Peace argues that rather than providing a new framework that introduces unanticipated consequences, social exclusion could be seen as another conceptual tool for talking about the linked and cumulative factors and processes confounding individual and group capacity for hope, opportunity, reciprocity and participation. He sees social exclusion and

social inclusion “ways of naming” the collective processes working to deprive people of access to opportunities and means, material or otherwise, to achieve well-being and security in the terms that are important to them.

Additionally, in the fields of research and politics, there had been increasing discussions about children’s opportunities to participate in discussions that relate to their lives (Tuukkanen, Kankaanranta & Wilska, 2013). Before, children’s lives had been studied exclusively from adults’ points of view and seeing children as objects and excluding them (Christensen & James, 2008). Furthermore, seeing families as having “funds of knowledge”, i.e., considering families’ experiences and practices as educational resources (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and considering them as active partners in education (Epstein, 2009) moved the focus of this study towards studying culturally and linguistically diverse children’s and parents’ experiences of participation and inclusion. Thus, this study had found its theoretical frameworks and connected the existing knowledge.

## **1.2 The focus of the study: culturally and linguistically diverse children’s and parents’ experiences of participation and inclusion**

The context of this study is in multicultural Finnish early childhood education and care. In this study, multicultural early childhood education and care is seen as an education that is aimed at both majority and minority children (Holm & Londen, 2010) and is focused on inclusion and participation for all children (Pascal & Bertram, 2018). In Finland, even though multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon (Martikainen, Saari & Korkiasaari, 2013) and several language and religious minorities, e.g., the Finnish-Swedish, the Sámi, the Jews, the Tatar, the Roma, have existed (see e.g., Tiilikainen, 2007), it was not until the 1990s that the phenomenon of multiculturalism as part of children’s world began to appear in Finnish early childhood education documents (Onnismäa, 2010).

Multicultural and intercultural learning and education in Finland has been studied rather broadly (e.g., Dervin & Li, 2018; Zilliacus, Holm & Sahlström, 2017; Itkonen, Dervin & Talib, 2017; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Layne & Dervin, 2016; Holm & Londen, 2010) but the lack of research on culturally and linguistically diverse families’ perspectives is particularly the case with Finnish early childhood education and care (e.g., Ansala, Hämäläinen & Sarvimäki, 2014; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Kuusisto, 2010; Niemelä, 2015; Ojala, 2010; Paavola, 2017). Additionally, there is no research on culturally and linguistically diverse children’s participation and effective pedagogical practices in the Finnish ECEC context although children’s participation has become a central focus in the new Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017), which is normative and nationally regulated.

From earlier research it has been found that ECEC settings may be immigrant families' first contact with their new home countries and an institution with which they have daily interaction (Tobin, Arzubiaga & Adair, 2013; Vesely, Ewaida & Kearney, 2013); therefore, ECEC programs should be regarded as an essential feature of integration and inclusion within new societies (Crosnoe & Alsari, 2015; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). The research evidence shows that parents' active participation contributes to children's academic success (e.g., Díez, Gatt, & Racionero, 2011; Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), successful transition to schools (Hutchinson et al., 2014; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005) and that inclusive ECEC pedagogy prevents social and educational exclusion and promotes a child's long-term school success (Crul, Schneider & Lelie, 2013; Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; CREA, 2012; Ojala, 2010), as well as co-existence between people of different cultures, religions and ideologies (Garcia, Lastikka & Petreñas, 2013).

Additionally, teachers play a crucial role in immigrant families' transition into early childhood education settings, when building trusting relationships with parents (De Gioia, 2015; Vandenbroeck, Roets & Snoeck, 2009). Early childhood education services have also been found to help immigrant families to build human, social and navigational capital (Vesely, Ewaida & Kearney, 2013). Furthermore, immigrant families face serious obstacles when trying to engage with their children's early educational experiences (Park & McHugh, 2014), practitioners are focusing on the deficiencies of families (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), parents are dependent on institutional and organizational power (Van Dijk, 2010) and power dynamics are not acknowledged (Doucet, 2011, 2008). In addition, there is currently little research on how partnerships are interpreted and accomplished, especially with culturally and linguistically diverse families (Hadley, 2014).

Currently, countries around the world are concerned with migration flows, which set challenges to the development of inclusive ECEC services and integration policies (Park, Katsiaficas & McHugh, 2018). Although Finland's migrant population is small by international standards, it has grown amongst the fastest in the OECD countries (OECD, 2018). In Finland, especially in the Capital Region, the number of foreign-language children in ECEC services has been increasing and it has been estimated that the number will continue to increase (City of Helsinki Urban Facts, 2016). It has been found that in the Finnish ECEC, there is a need to strengthen the cultural sensitivity and multicultural competence in the training of ECEC educators (Kuusisto, Kallioniemi & Matilainen, 2014) and a call for opportunities and support for educators' self-reflection that would affect the moral foundations of the educational approach towards worldview sensitivity (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012).

Furthermore, recent research (Paananen et al., 2018) has shown that when discussing equality in relation to the Finnish ECEC system, the potential disadvantaged position of groups of parents in the Finnish society was not addressed; what is alarming is that parents were not regarded as being involved in any oppressive power relations that might influence their chances to make

informed decisions or utilize the services they wish or need. Therefore, research on developing inclusive ECEC services, particularly on culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' perceptions of participation and inclusion in the Finnish early childhood education and care, is needed.

### 1.3 General aim, research objectives and questions

The present study is based on three original articles (Articles I, II and III) that study the phenomenon of culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of participation and inclusion in the Finnish ECEC practices. The primary aim of this study is:

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*The aim of this study is to create a model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy that identifies the essential elements in building and developing inclusive and participatory practices.*

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To achieve this general objective, the general research question of this study is: Which are the essential elements in building and developing inclusive and participatory ECEC practices? Furthermore, the other aims and research questions are:

1. Identifying culturally and linguistically diverse families' experiences on inclusive and participatory ECEC practices in Finland. Hence, the research question related to this objective is:
  - 1.1 Which ECEC practices enhance or hinder inclusion and participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families? (Article I)
2. Identifying the daily activities in ECEC that have the most positive effects on immigrant children's participation.
  - 2.1 Which ECEC activities and practices increase culturally and linguistically diverse children's participation? (Article III)
3. Studying children's experiences of participation and inclusion when interviewing 4- to 7-year-old children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) research. Hence, in order to study this, the research questions are:

3.1 What kind of ethical considerations exist when interviewing children in ECEC? (Article II)

3.2 How can children's experiences of participation and inclusion in ECEC be promoted through ethical interviewing? (Article II)

**Table 1.** Research objectives, participants, data and methods of each article

<b>Article</b>	Article I Immigrant parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context	Article II Ethical Reflections on Interviewing Young Children: Opportunities and Challenges for Promoting Children's Inclusion and Participation	Article III Increasing Immigrant Children's Participation in the Finnish Early Childhood Education Context
<b>Authors</b>	Lastikka, A-L. & Lipponen, L.	Lastikka, A-L. & Kangas, J.	Arvola, O., Lastikka, A-L. & Reunamo, J.
<b>Journal</b>	<i>International Journal of Multicultural Education</i>	<i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education</i>	
<b>Publication year</b>	2016	2017	2017
<b>Research objective</b>	To identify culturally and linguistically diverse families' experiences on inclusive and participatory ECEC practices in Finland	To describe and identify ethical opportunities and challenges in interviewing young children in ECEC and to explore interviewing as a means to bring forward children's experiences of participation and inclusion in the Finnish ECEC	To identify daily activities that have the most positive effects on children's participation in the Finnish ECEC
<b>Research participants</b>	13 culturally and linguistically diverse parents living in Finland	4–7-year old children (N=173) in Finnish ECEC settings	Culturally and linguistically diverse 1- to 7-year-old children (N=316) in Finnish ECEC settings
<b>Research data</b>	Parents' audiotaped and transcribed interviews (N=14)	Children's interviews (N=173)	Observations (N=7,905) of children made by ECEC teachers (N=200)
<b>Method for analysis</b>	Qualitative inductive content analysis	Qualitative inductive content analysis (1 <sup>st</sup> phase), abductive content analysis (2 <sup>nd</sup> phase)	Quantitative statistical methods (partial correlation)

## **2 INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE FINNISH ECEC**

In this chapter, I will describe the Finnish ECEC context particularly in relation to inclusion and family and children's participation, which are the foci of this study. These are discussed with reference to the newly revised Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017), the Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (National Board of Education, 2010), the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) and the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes, 2005), because all these curricula were followed when undertaking this study.

### **2.1 The Finnish ECEC system in general**

In Finland, early childhood education and care (ECEC) applies a holistic “educare” model, which combines care, education and teaching as the foundation for pedagogical activities (Salminen, 2017). All children have a subjective right to have a place in ECEC provided by a local authority. One year before compulsory education children need to participate in pre-primary education, which is free of charge. In 2015, the Government of Finland voted for restrictions to prevent children whose parents are home (on parental leave or due to unemployment) to participate in full-day early childhood education and care (Government Programme, 2015). This decision has endangered the right to equal education and participation for all children and may hinder particularly the integration of immigrant and refugee families into the Finnish society. On the other hand, Paananen et al. (2018) has brought forward that access to ECEC services does not necessarily guarantee a reduction of inequality. However, although we know that access to high-quality ECEC is beneficial in tackling societal inequalities (CREA, 2012; Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; Ojala, 2010), I agree with Paananen et al. (2018) that the access alone is not sufficient when enhancing equality in the ECEC system; it is relevant to discuss if the Finnish ECEC system benefits mostly those who are already doing relatively well in our society.

Finnish ECEC is mainly organized in ECEC centres, family day care or as other forms of early childhood education and care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018a) and the content of ECEC is regulated by the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017) and the new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), which entered into force on 1st September 2018. Pre-primary education is an integral part of ECEC and is provided one

year before entering primary school. It is based on the framework of National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). In addition to these steering curricula, municipalities and/ or cities can draw a local ECEC curriculum that must be consistent with the national core curricula. Furthermore, individual ECEC and pre-primary plans are prepared for each child in order to enhance children's and guardians' participation in ECEC and plan the pedagogical practices and methods, as well as determine how to implement the planned pedagogy in order to meet children's individual needs (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Salminen, 2017).

In the Finnish ECEC, support for the child's development and learning is seen as part of high-quality ECEC activities; each child in need of support has a right to receive it. Furthermore, the language skills of foreign language speaking and plurilingual children are supported in the Finnish ECEC (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017), as is the development of their linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem. Pre-primary education is regarded to have an important significance in recognizing early the needs for support in growth and learning, providing support and preventing difficulties (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

## **2.2 The ECEC reforms in relation to participation**

When undertaking this study, the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes, 2005), the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010) and the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) were the regulating curricula for ECEC and pre-primary education. From the beginning of 2013, the Ministry of Education and Culture has had the overall responsibility for ECEC after which it has been seen more as part of the educational system and lifelong learning (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Karila et al., 2017). Before 2013, ECEC was part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). It has been found (e.g., Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010) that the implementation of ECEC before the recently revised legislation and curriculum was varied, because of the different interpretations and that there has been quality variation among ECEC organisations (Hujala, Fonsén & Elo, 2012).

In relation to family participation, these above-mentioned curricula stressed the cooperation between ECEC and pre-primary personnel and guardians. In the Finnish National Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes, 2005), the concept of ECEC partnership was used: it covered participation that went beyond cooperation. The used attributes of this partnership and communication were *mutual*, *continuous* and *committed*. The experiences of being heard and mutual understanding were also highlighted.



Additionally, it was seen that the nature of the relationship between ECEC personnel and parents is a fundamental part of children's well-being.

In pre-primary education, the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) operates by using the term *cooperation* in which development of trust, equity in interaction and mutual respect are seen as premises. This cooperation demands that the personnel initiate personal interaction with guardians.

Regarding families with diverse cultural and linguistic background, the National Curriculum Guidelines (Stakes, 2005) focused on informing families about the goals and principles of the curriculum, as well as supporting the integration of children into the Finnish society. Parents and ECEC personnel were required to prepare together an individual learning plan in which each child's culture, background and customs were planned and supported. Furthermore, the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) considers children's different language and cultural backgrounds and abilities. Pre-primary education aims to support the language and cultural identity of each child and teach respect for different languages and cultures.

The Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017) have adopted a new premise of parental participation; partnership has been changed to cooperation aiming to promote *joint commitment of guardians and personnel to children's healthy and safe growth, development and learning*. The cooperation, which is described as educational cooperation, is enhanced by interaction, which is defined as *equal*. Additionally, cooperation is promoted by *trust*. The Curriculum requires that the ECEC personnel are interactive and actively cooperate with guardians. Furthermore, cooperation allows for the diversity of families, children's individual needs and questions related to guardianship and parenthood. When necessary, they all can use an interpreter to guarantee mutual understanding (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017).

Currently, children's participation has a central premise in the revised Curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017) and in the Finnish ECEC research (e.g., Kangas, 2016; Kangas & Lastikka, 2019; Karlsson, Weckström & Lastikka, 2018; Virkki, 2015; Vuorisalo, 2013; Turja, 2016). In the former Curriculum (Stakes, 2005), the notion of children's participation was not a primary concept but children were seen as active learners, who express themselves and learn through playing, moving and exploring. It was regarded that if children can use these natural ways of thinking and acting, their well-being, sense of self and participation are strengthened (Stakes, 2005).

## **2.3 The ECEC reforms in relation to inclusion**

In the Finnish education system, inclusion has been seen as a right based on the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989)

and on the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). The Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017) states that “the development of early childhood education and care is guided by the inclusion principle and that all children may participate in early childhood education and care together, regardless of such issues as their needs for support, disability or cultural background” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). Moreover, it is seen that an inclusive operational culture promotes participation, equality and equity in all activities, as well as in the context of developing the operational culture in which it is seen to be crucial to discuss the attitudes towards equity and equality in the working community: attitudes connected with language, ethnicity, worldview, disability, gender and its diversity become apparent in discussions, gestures and actions (ibid.).

In the National Curriculum Guidelines (Stakes, 2005), inclusion as a concept did not appear; however, the Curriculum was based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) stating that each child should not be subject to discrimination of any kind, should have equal rights to the full and harmonious development of his or her personality and his or her best interests should be a primary consideration. Furthermore, the child has a right to express his/her own views in all matters affecting the child. Other premises related to inclusion were children’s rights to safe relationships, safe growth, development and learning and a healthy environment where they can play and act in varied ways. They should have opportunities to be seen and heard according to their age and maturity, receive special and care if needed and have a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Stakes, 2005).

The Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (Ministry of Education, 2010), in addition to the Constitution of Finland (731/1999) and the above-described Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) all mention that Finland is committed to international agreements, programmes and declarations that require the organization of teaching so that the growth and learning of all children can be secured as well as possible. It lists the following international agreements: Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the Charter of Luxembourg (European Commission, 1996) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). The importance of the Salamanca Statement lies in the inclusion of the focus on the development of inclusive schools in relation to the goal of achieving education for all; this was a milestone for inclusive education (Miles & Singal, 2010). As for the importance of the Charter of Luxembourg (European Commission, 1996), all European countries accepted that inclusive education is an important prerequisite for ensuring equal opportunities for all children throughout life (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

In the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014), which regulates the pre-primary education together with the Basic Education Act (628/1998), inclusion is regarded as important: the development of the operational culture is promoted towards inclusion and diversity and this development is done according to inclusive

principles. Each child should be able to act, develop and learn as a unique personality and part of the community. The underlying values of pre-primary education are equity and equality; pre-primary education should safeguard sufficient equity throughout Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

## **2.4. Synthesis of the national and international reforms in relation to this study**

In summary, the Finnish ECEC and pre-primary curricula, the international reforms and declarations, all aspects of inclusive family and children's participation, are relevant for this study. Although these are highly stressed in the Finnish curricula and reforms, there are some concerns that are central for this study.

In relation to the participation and inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse families, the recent OECD report (OECD, 2018) on the integration of immigrants and their children in Finland states that the children of migrant women in Finland are more likely to be cared for at home for a long time. This is particularly the case among those children whose parents come from refugee-sending countries. The report states that cash-for-care schemes, such as the availability of the Child Home Care Allowance, which is granted if an under three-year-old child is looked after at home tempt immigrant women to stay at home as they can secure income in that way (see also, Tervola, 2015). This in turn, has long-term effects on mothers, their children and the Finnish economy. Therefore, the OECD's policy recommendations suggest that special attention in relation to ECEC practices should be placed on the ECEC participation of 3- to 4-year-old children of migrants, as well as on the provision of supplementary language development activities (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, policy recommendations suggest that the child home care allowance should be revisited to guarantee that children of migrant women have access to ECEC services.

Additionally, although children's participation and inclusion are central in the Finnish ECEC and pre-primary curricula, it has been found that there are segregation practices in the Finnish educational system (Blakeslee, 2015) where immigrant children may experience marginality (Lappalainen, 2006); ECEC educators' educational views and learning philosophies of a child-centred point of view take into account the individual child's needs and skills are not realized in their activities (Paavola, 2007). Furthermore, critical reflection, a theoretical basis and cultural assumptions are lacking from the discourse of ECEC educators (Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016).

Moreover, although cooperation with parents is seen as a significant element in the Finnish ECEC, as well as in the other Nordic countries (Karila, 2012), there has been criticism towards partnership, because the responsibilities and tasks in public services are not based on equality and free choice (Kekkonen, 2012a). Therefore, it is essential to question how much the institutional order

privileges white middle-class children and their families (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Prins & Toso, 2008). Recently, it has been found that immigrant parents experience questions about their parenthood in ECEC institutions (Hiitola & Peltola, 2018). Accordingly, there is a need in the Finnish ECEC to move towards some positive practices that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 3 MOVING AWAY FROM DEFICIENCIES TO A STRENGTHS-BASED PARADIGM

### 3.1 The central concepts

As the objective of this study is to learn about culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of participation and inclusion in Finnish early childhood education and care, it is relevant to define the used concepts carefully. The central concepts in this study are *culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, diversity, participation, inclusion and children's and families' experiences*.

First, discussing culturally and linguistically diverse children and families does not mean that they are a uniform group: in this study, the research consists of persons, who belong to several different nationalities or ethnic groups. Furthermore, the way parents identify and live a similar social identity may differ among individuals (Machart et al., 2014); although categorizing the parents to a group of culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, we need to be aware that it consists of persons who may identify themselves differently.

Secondly, the concept of diversity in this study stems from the wider understanding of diversity, which includes diversity in ethnicity, gender, ability, culture and family composition (Vandenbroeck, 2018). It is seen as making a positive contribution involving a change from the 'deficit' thinking of educational setting in which certain types of learners are considered to lack something (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008).

In the research articles, the terms *immigrant children* is used referring to non-native people who live in Finland and *immigrant parents* are used referring as well as Finland-born or non-native children who live in Finland with at least one immigrant parent. The words *immigrant* and *migrant* (as well as *foreigner*) are generally used synonymously, although the dictionary distinguishes immigrants, as those who are or intend to be settlers in their new country, from migrants, as those who are temporary residents (Anderson & Blinder, 2015).

In this study, the term *non-Finnish speaking background* was considered, but *culturally and linguistically diverse children and families* was found to be more suitable, because I argue it identifies better the cultural and linguistic diversity of the current Finnish society and is positive and does not refer to people lacking the ability to speak Finnish (see also Sawrikar & Katz, 2009). Furthermore, the term *families* is used versus *parents*, because it encompasses better the diversity of families living in today's world and does not exclude children living with persons other than their parents. Therefore, the concept of *culturally and linguistically diverse children and families* is generally used in this study, unless some other term has been specifically applied in a cited study.

Thirdly, the general concept of participation in this study is defined according to James and James (2012, 86) as “taking part in and contributing actively to a situation, an event, a process or an outcome, although the extent of the contribution and the autonomy with which it is made may vary considerably and may be constrained in various ways”. Furthermore, the starting point of this study is that all members in ECEC settings should be regarded as participants, who have “the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity” (Council of Europe, 2012).

Additionally, participation should be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalized children to be involved. Children should not be seen as a homogenous group and participation should provide equal chances to participate without any discrimination because of age, gender, ethnicity, family, culture, geographical location, language, religion, ability or financial situation (Lansdown, 2011; United Nations, 1989). Thus, the important question in research is to consider who is included and vice versa, who is excluded (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015).

Furthermore, the concept of participation in this study is twofold and partially different concerning children’s participation and families’ participation. In this study, children’s participation is interpreted as a responsibility of educators to actively and sensitively observe, enable, act, develop and collaborate with children and other members of the ECEC settings towards children’s development, learning, actions, initiatives, interests, interpretations, opinions, decision-making, non-verbal communication, as well as shared activities (see also Berthelsen et al., 2009; Kangas, 2016; Kangas, Ojala & Venninen, 2015; Kangas & Lastikka, 2019; Karlsson, 2018; Karlsson, Weckström & Lastikka, 2018; Rogoff, 2007). When studying culturally and linguistically diverse children’s participation, the concept of participation should also include the sense of belonging, as the importance of friendships and relationships with educators is highlighted (Dusi, Steinbacha & Falcon, 2014), especially when immigrating to a new society.

In this study, when discussing families’ participation, one needs to be careful, because definitions, written and spoken, may exclude those who already are living on the edge of the society (Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). Additionally, care should be taken in using the concepts of family participation, family involvement, family partnership, family engagement and co-operation, when including the perspectives, perceptions, and actual involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in the ECEC services of their children. The premise of this study supports the view that family partnerships—in this study family participation—is a multidimensional concept (Epstein et al., 2009) and a research area, because families have different priorities and values of high-quality preschool dependent on their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Therefore, diverse meanings exist when discussing participation: family participation may indicate very different meanings to different families (Vandenbroeck, Roets & Snoeck, 2009).

Fourthly, the concept of inclusion must be clarified; in this study, it is understood as a positive value related to recognition and freedom: children and their families are able to experience and realize freedom if they participate and are included in ECEC services, which is characterized by practices of mutual recognition and promotion of participation in social practices, which do not produce heteronomy or isolation (Felder, 2018).

Inclusion is also seen as an ongoing process that aims to provide quality education for all while respecting diversity, different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of children and communities, while eliminating all forms of discrimination (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008). It is also important to see that every child has unique characteristics, abilities, interests and learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). In this study, the premise of understanding inclusion from an inclusive framework based on the international declarations and conventions (United Nations, 2006, 1989; UNESCO, 1994), is vital.

In this study, inclusion is seen as a framework in which everyone has a voice that should be heard and considered (Felder, 2018) so it is closely connected to participation and diversity. Inclusive education is perceived as a process of removing barriers to participation (Loreman, 2017) in order to identify which practices exclude individuals or groups of children and then guarantee that those barriers are eliminated (see Mittler, 2012); in this study that means to identify the ECEC practices that promote children's and their families' experiences of inclusion and participation and develop the inclusive and participatory pedagogy in ECEC. This aligns with the increased ECEC research and policy interest in participation and inclusion of children both internationally (e.g., European Commission, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018) and nationally (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017; Paananen et al., 2018), as well as with the research evidence that inclusive ECEC pedagogy prevents social and educational exclusion (Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; Ojala, 2010).

Since the main concepts of this study have been clarified, the theoretical framework of this study will be discussed next. As has been brought forward, there is a request for the paradigm shift in the Finnish ECEC to cease seeing culturally and linguistically diverse children and families as lacking something (Lightfoot, 2004), being a marginalized (Lappalainen, 2006) or homogeneous group (Machart et al., 2014) or as "Others" (Hage, 2000). I argue there is a need to change this view towards seeing culturally and linguistically diverse children and families as involved, competent and knowledgeable (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2010).

### **3.2 Critiques of a deficit paradigm: towards a strength-based paradigm and funds of knowledge**

There is a shortage of research on the barriers to minority parental participation but an abundance of research on the deficiencies of minority parents. The

research evidence (e.g., Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) suggests that a traditional paradigm for parent involvement focuses on parents' deficiencies. Lightfoot (2004) argues that the more we talk or write of immigrant parents as without useful knowledge, it becomes more difficult to envision inviting them into schools to share their perceptions or knowledge. She has also found that in the named topics of seminars for immigrant parents, there was a presumption that the immigrant parents lacked something that their middle-class counterparts have (Lightfoot, 2004). Furthermore, Gillie (2011) states that in an evaluative approach, parents are represented as incompetent and lacking parenting skills (see also, Hiitola & Peltola, 2018). I argue that the perception of seeing parents as lacking something presses parents to change their behaviour to fit the demands of ECEC services.

Furthermore, it has been found that there is a disconnect between partnership talk and actual involvement: immigrant parents are being socialized to be passive and less empowered in relation to partnership in early childhood education (Crosnoe & Alsari, 2015). This may be the case with all families, including non-immigrant families; Onnismaa (2010) has identified from the Finnish national ECEC documents the discourse of a weak family that needs consistent help. Kekkonen (2012b) has asserted that it is essential to discuss the ways ECEC practices interpret families' different values, attitudes, questions, worries and needs for support in relation to upbringing, care and learning. She asks whether they are understood as weaknesses of families, wishes for shared responsibility or as parents' initiatives to strengthen their own expertise.

It has also been shown that in Finland, relationships between ECEC staff and parents are hierarchical and parents are marginalised by pedagogy (e.g., Alasuutari, 2010; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012) or seen as rather passive (Hujala et al., 2009). Although in Finland there has been an attempt to promote partnerships between families and early childhood educators, the current public discourse in Finland has involved seeing personnel as experts and families as service customers, which in turn may generate doubt within families (Hujala et al., 2009).

The deficit thinking, which is founded on racial and class bias seeing that school failure is due to students, especially minority and low-income students and their families' deficiencies, has been criticized (Valencia, 2010); this turns the focus away from an analysis and criticism of the structures that prevent minority students from learning. Therefore, I argue that the focus should move away from a focus on deficiencies (Kim, 2009) to a view of families as having "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). When teachers change their roles of teacher and expert and alternatively acquire a new role as a learner, it is possible for them to familiarize themselves with children and their families in new and unfamiliar ways. With this new knowledge, teachers could see that these families hold rich cultural and cognitive resources. Drawing on families' expertise by acknowledging their funds of knowledge, teachers help families to feel more comfortable, involved and competent in their childrearing practices (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2010).



Closely related to focusing on each family's knowledge, the theoretical framework of this study supports a strength-based approach (e.g., Dunst, Trivette & Mott, 1994; Powell et al., 1997), which presumes that all families have strengths on which they can build to meet and promote their needs, goals and well-being. Professionals help the family to use these strengths as building blocks to increase the well-being of the child and the whole family. Together they create a partnership, which involves contributions and shared responsibilities during the process (Powell et al., 1997). This approach embraces the particular knowledge, competences and resources of each family entrenched in families' beliefs, cultural and ethnic heritage, or socio-economic background (Dunst, Trivette & Mott, 1994) and it has been found to be effective in reinforcing the significance of teachers' understanding that all individuals are culturally located. They can also recognise the knowledge of marginalised students and their families as a means to change negative perceptions supported by deficit theorizing (Hogg, 2011). Consequently, I argue that the "funds of knowledge" approach may be an empowering theoretical framework with immigrant families who may struggle with integration to the new home country or who are not familiar with the ECEC services provided by the society.

Although strength-based partnerships feature equality, the roles of families and professionals are substantially different: both sides have their own expertise, functions and objectives that are important to define, establish and accept collaboratively (Powell et al., 1997). In early childhood education and care, there is a risk that practitioners silence those they wish to include by 'good practice' (e.g., Vandenbroeck, 2009; Vandenbroeck, Roets & Snoeck, 2009) or teachers control educational discourse (Van Dijk, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to constantly rethink conceptions of what 'good practice' may be. It has been reported (Lappalainen, 2006) that in the Finnish preschool context, an ability to follow timetables was regarded as a part of qualified parenthood and that immigrants were said to possess a 'different understanding concerning time'. This in turn resulted in seeing accuracy as a Finnish national virtue and producing a positive 'we' (Finnish) and a negative 'they' (immigrants). Lappalainen states that the Finnish culture is conceived as more disciplined and more rational than 'others', particularly eastern and southern cultures. This study supports the idea that reciprocity and belonging are possible with the help of reflexive practitioners and that 'good practice' is the result of a multiplicity of contradictory perspectives that are both 'true' and exclusive (Vandenbroeck, Roets & Snoeck, 2009).

Additionally, families should not be seen as a homogenous group, and promoting participation with families should provide equal chances to participate without any discrimination because of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (United Nations, 1948). Who is included or excluded (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015) should be considered and the patterns of access to discourse in ECEC services should be analysed. When developing family participation with immigrant families, it is essential to ask who may say what, how and to whom in what circumstances? (Van Dijk, 1996)

### **3.3 The socio-cultural perspective intertwined with the approaches of strength-based approach and funds of knowledge**

The strength-based (Dunst, Trivette & Mott, 1994; Powell et al., 1997) and “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) approaches as discussed before resemble the premises of the socio-cultural perspective in which children are seen as active and competent participants in their communities (Berthelsen et al., 2009; Corsaro, 2011; Rogoff, 2007). In this study, adopting the socio-cultural approach combined with the strength-based approach and “funds of knowledge” concept enhances an inclusive and participatory pedagogy in early childhood education and care, as it situates the child as an active and equal agent producing knowledge together with others. This study focuses on creating a model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy, in an attempt to identify critical elements in building and developing inclusive and participatory practices. It is regarded that in inclusive approach one central element is the pedagogy: how teachers teach and how learners learn (Loreman, 2017), including what kind of teaching methods, approaches and principles enhancing learner participation are applied (Makoelle, 2014).

In early childhood education research, sociocultural perspectives, such as the theories of Vygotsky (1986) and Rogoff (2007) have become influential (Berthelsen et al., 2009) with the result that children are seen as equal actors with adults and through their interactive and collaborative relationships learning and development occur in a social context and community shared between children and adults. Additionally, children’s participation (Kangas, 2016; Kangas & Lastikka, 2019; Karlsson, Weckström & Lastikka, 2018; Virkki, 2015; Vuorisalo, 2013; Turja, 2016) and sense of agency (e.g. Hilppö et al., 2016; Kumpulainen et al., 2013) have become important and emergent themes in early childhood education research; the focus has shifted from regarding children as objects to understanding them as social agents, who contribute to the reproduction of childhood and society (Corsaro, 2011).

Regarding the pedagogy of culturally and linguistically diverse children, I argue that the socio-cultural image of a child allows for treating children as individuals, seizing children’s initiatives and involving them in planning and implementation of activities (see also, Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Lastikka & Kangas, 2019). Moreover, it is seen that children’s participation is linked to the image of their competence and importance (Nyland, 2009; Rutar, 2013). Viewing children as agentic, capable and competent rather than as needy and incapable moves the focus towards the strength-based and funds of knowledge approaches.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research settings, participants, data collection and the analysis methods of this study will be discussed in detail.

### 4.1 The research settings, data collections and analysis methods of Article I and Article II

The research data for Article I and Article II were gathered during four years between 2007–2010 and was part of the international INCLUD-ED (Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education) Project, which was carried out for five years (2006–2011). The project countries were Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. The general aim of the project was to analyse educational actions contributing to social cohesion and to understand practices leading to social exclusion (Flecha, 2015). At the University of Helsinki, the Department of Teacher Education, focused on early childhood education, primary school education and special education.

The INCLUD-ED project consisted of six different sub-projects (CREA, 2012) and the data for the first and second article of this study have been gathered in the sub-project 6 called “Local Projects for Social Cohesion”, which studied communities where social and educational interventions were implemented in order to find factors that contribute to the reduction of inequality and exclusion and promote social integration and inclusion. The countries in which project 6 was carried out were: Finland, Lithuania, Malta, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The Finnish research team in which I was working from 2006 till 2011, carefully selected one ECEC centre in eastern Helsinki situated in the same building as the primary school and the youth action centre. The selection criteria were that the selected ECEC centre should be situated in a low socio-economic area, where at least 50% of the children are of immigrant background and that has developed existing inclusive ECEC practices, as well as strong community involvement that are helping to overcome inequalities (CREA, 2012). During the research process, there were approximately 20 children in pre-primary education, 40 children in ECEC and nine staff members. About 52% of the children had an immigrant background representing Brazil, Egypt, Estonia, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Liberia, Palestine, Russia, Somalia, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam (see Niemelä, 2015; Ojala, Niemelä & Lastikka, 2010).

The educators of the selected ECEC centre had been working with culturally and linguistically diverse families for a long time and had put special effort in developing inclusive ECEC practices and pedagogy for cooperation with

families. Additionally, egalitarian dialogue was seen as a strategy that promoted parent-teacher cooperation. The educators also had the idea that they were working for the parents and they did everything they could to cooperate with the families. They saw that communication was the key to understanding and the motto of the personnel was *negotiation, negotiation and negotiation*. From the very beginning, the personnel assumed their primary responsibility was to create a partnership with families and children. The basis of partnership in the selected day care centre was mutual trust, effective communication and respect among child, family and ECEC personnel. Parents had the primary responsibility and knowledge of their child's upbringing, as was regulated already in the former Curriculum Guidelines (Stakes, 2005) and the objective of the partnership was to reinforce the emotional relationship between guardians and children.

In establishing a partnership, the smooth transition to ECEC was considered to be extremely important in the ECEC centre: there were brochures and documents in different languages for families, whose home language was other than Finnish, discussions concerning the child's individual ECEC plan or individual pre-school education plan took place with interpreters if needed. The educators were interested in learning the languages of families and there were some educators, who could speak Estonian, Somali, and Russian languages so they could communicate with the children and families, who did not speak Finnish. These educators also held language and culture clubs for the children in order to support their home languages and cultures. Overall, the main goal of the ECEC centre was to support together with the guardians the child's growth to a well-balanced, cooperative and self-trusting individual and a member of the community (see also Lastikka & García, 2012).

The research data of the first and second article consist of 13 audiotaped and transcribed in-depth interviews with parents of immigrant background (the first article) and 27 audiotaped and transcribed in-depth interviews with 5- to 7-year-old children of both Finnish and immigrant background (the first and second article). The participants were selected by applying chain sampling (Patton, 2015). At the beginning of the study, the selected ECEC centre suggested the most information-rich examples among the children. In these articles, the term 'children of immigrant background' was used to describe both first-generation children and of those children born in Finland to immigrant parents. Parents referred to with 'immigrant background' were parents, who were born somewhere other than Finland. In the data for the first article, one of the parents was a native Finnish father, but he had an immigrant spouse.

The two articles included in this study are linked to the tradition of qualitative studies in educational research. Because the objective was to study and interpret experiences through interviews (Patton, 2015), the qualitative research was suitable and well-founded. Patton (2015) has aptly described that choosing an appropriate method lies in what you want to know; if you want to know how much children are able to read, you give them a reading test, but if you want to study what reading means for children, you should talk with them, listen to them and ask qualitative inquiry questions. Therefore, to get responses to specific key questions while offering flexibility to explore other topics, which

could not have been anticipated beforehand, I used a combination of a standardized open-ended interview format with an interview guide approach (Patton, 1990). The aim of this interview approach was to achieve an agreed-upon interpretation of children's reality. One of the INCLUD-ED project's starting points for the research was that the results are the product of an equal dialogue *with* social agents, not a dialogue *on* them (CREA, 2012).

Concerning the research participant parents (Article I), they were given written information about the study and a consent form (translated into several languages), as well as an option to use an interpreter in an interview, which was utilized by some of the parents. In addition, voluntariness, confidentiality and anonymity were stressed to the participants. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked if the interview could be recorded. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes.

As for the research participant children (the article II), they and their parents were given written information about the study and a consent form that were also translated into several languages. The option of having an interpreter in the interview was offered to the children. The interview questions were related to inclusion, community and family involvement/participation, participation in ECEC (activities, decision-making, curriculum planning), learning, diversity, after-school activities and improvements in the lives of children and families. The time range of the interviews was between 15 and 60 minutes.

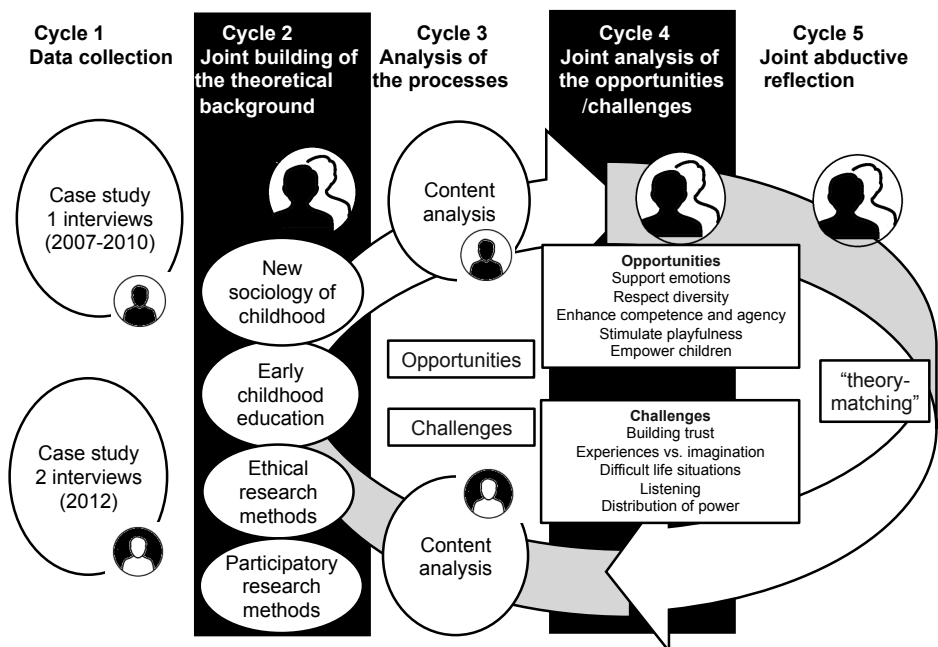
In the research analysis of the interviews for the first article, inductive content analysis was used to identify meanings and consistencies through patterns, themes and categories (Patton, 2015; 1990). The data relating to the research questions was organized into 23 different themes followed by the identification of preliminary categories. After rereading and rechecking the coding consistency, the four final themes were determined. I found that inductive content analysis was fitting to allow meaningful dimensions to emerge from the data without determinate these dimensions beforehand (Patton, 2015). Additionally, because there was an abundance of research data, Atlas.ti (Frieze, 2015) was used to help with handling the vast research data. The transcribed data was moved into the Atlas.ti software after which I read the whole data through several times. Then the preliminary coding of categories was done and the final themes were decided. I did not use the feature of Atlas.ti to analyse the data so the software was applied to help me handle the data.

For the second article, a qualitative research synthesis (Patton, 2015) approach was applied to identify and illustrate ethical issues, when interviewing young children in early childhood education and to study interviewing as a means to bring forward children's experiences of participation and inclusion. These were studied through two different research cases to fully illuminate and elaborate emergent findings (Patton, 2015); I was responsible for Case study 1.

The research analysis was done in two phases: for the first phase, I applied the above described content analysis (Patton, 2015; 1990) and this phase was done independently. For the second phase, abductive content analysis (Andreewsky & Bourcier, 2000; Kováč & Spens, 2005; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) was applied and was done in a joint analysis. The argument

for choosing abductive analysis was based on the strengths of abductive analysis; it combined empirical observations and theory so the empiric and theory were not only intertwined but extended each other. This in turn pushed the theoretic to unforeseen directions (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Moreover, the analysis method was suitable, because it allowed me to conduct joint analysis in the triangulation process through several cycles of interaction between researchers, theory and data using the benefits from both inductive and deductive approaches (Kováč & Spens, 2005). In the triangulation process, two different data collection processes, know-how of two researchers and the use of multiple theoretical perspectives were used. This triangulation had a crucial role, because it allowed a deep understanding when analysing the data and finding the themes of the phenomenon. In Figure 1, this creative triangulation process is illustrated to clarify the data analysis.

### The triangulation process



**Figure 1.** The triangulation process based on the abductive content analysis

## **4.2 The research context, data collection and analysis method of the Article III**

The research data for Article III was collected in the on-going Orientation Project conducted at the University of Helsinki and led by the project director, university lecturer Jyrki Reunamo. The project is an ECEC research and development project that takes place in Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. For this study, the research data has been collected in Finland. The project aims to study what actually happens in early childhood education, how children's orientations, skills and peer relations affect activities, and how ECEC educators' actions and the ECEC learning environments relate to unfolding activities. The motives behind these objectives are to find practical and relevant tools to help direct, measure and evaluate ECEC and early learning, to find the factors that create meaningful activities in the learning environment and to introduce development tasks and produced models for ECEC educators (see more, e.g., Arvola, Reunamo & Kytälä, 2017; Kyhälä, Reunamo & Ruismäki, 2018; Reunamo & Sajaniemi, 2018; Veijalainen, Reunamo & Alijoki, 2017).

The research data for this study was collected from 316 children (boys N=178, girls N=134) with immigrant backgrounds in Finnish ECEC centres and preschools. Of these children, 71 children had special needs, which represents a larger proportion of this group compared with non-immigrant Finnish children. The data was gathered in 108 day care centres from 11 municipalities in southern Finland. In the selection of day care centres, a stratified sampling was used (Patton, 2015).

From September to December 2014, observers (N=200) were trained to observe children in ECEC settings. The observation training included one session per month, with a one-month period to practise observation between the training sessions. During the training, teachers observed videos of everyday ECEC situations and the observation categories were discussed one by one. The observation instrument was originally prepared for Reunamo's (2007) preliminary research.

The children's data consists of observations (N=7,905) that were made between January and May 2015 by using the Leuven Scale for Involvement (Laevers, 1994). The observations were based on a systematic sampling, with one child being watched every five minutes. After five minutes, the next child on the list was observed. When this round was completed, the observations began again for a total of four hours per day for each group. The observer did not participate in the activities. The observed activities included general activity, children's activity, the object of children's attention, physical activity, involvement (see Laevers, 2003), emotional behaviour and social activity. For this study, observations of the participatory type of social activity were used in the analysis.

The data was analysed with the IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 23). In the analysis, partial correlations were used to prevent the children's age from being an intermediate variable (Pallant, 2010).

### 4.3 The description of the independent work

The first article (*Immigrant parents' perspectives on early childhood education and care practices in the Finnish multicultural context*) was my first independent academic research paper. It was co-authored with my supervisor Professor Lasse Lipponen. I hold the main responsibility of the entire article including the research process and independent writing. I gathered the research data (interviews) by myself for four years, transcribed and analysed the data and evolved the theoretical background and literature. Professor Lipponen commented and suggested some revisions particularly on the research methodology. We sent our paper to the *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, which accepted and published our manuscript. I carried out the revisions requested from reviewers and editors with the help from Professor Lipponen.

Article II (*Ethical reflections of interviewing young children: opportunities and challenges for promoting children's inclusion and participation*) was co-authored with PhD Jonna Kangas; the idea of writing a co-authored paper on ethical challenges in ECEC research related to children's participation and inclusion had been discussed already in 2012. The research data consisted of two separate case studies in which the data collection was done separately. I collected most of the research data from children during four years (one year the data was collected by a member of the research team), transcribed the data and analysed the first phase of the data analysis. The second phase of the research analysis was done together in a joint analysis with PhD Kangas. We built the theoretical framework was together. I carried the main responsibility of the writing and correspondence with the editor of the journal (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*) and made requested revisions together with PhD Jonna Kangas.

On Article III (*Increasing immigrant children's participation in the Finnish early childhood education context*), I was the second co-author together with doctoral student Outi Arvola as the first author and the principal investigator, senior lecturer Jyrki Reunamo as the third co-author. I was asked to join the writing team; thus, my role was to write the introduction and literature review together with the first author. I also contributed to writing the conclusions and implications.



## **5 ETHICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

In this chapter, I find it essential to critically reflect on the ethical, methodological and personal issues of this study, because critical reflection helps to recognize and negotiate complex ethical issues and examine their influences (e.g., Smith, 2011).

### **5.1 Ethical reflections**

As my research journey has lasted for a rather long time, I have encountered many ethical challenges during the research process and built an ethical radar (Skånfors, 2009) that has guided this research. The core ethical principles (reliability, honesty, respect and accountability) of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (All European Academics, 2017) and Research in the Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences and Proposals (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2009) have also been applied in this study. Next, the ethical values, challenges and solutions will be discussed.

The ethical challenges related to research planning and data collection in my research, concerned especially core values and informed consent. There are usually three typical values that should lead research: autonomy, good will, safety and justice (Mustajoki & Mustajoki, 2017). In my research, autonomy, which relates to the key concepts of privacy and confidentiality (ibid.), meant that all the participants (children, guardians, personnel) were informed about the project, their right to participate or refuse to take part and their freedom to withdraw from the research at any time during the research project. Because there were many immigrant children and parents in the research setting, the information letter and informed consent were provided in Finnish, English, Somali, and Arabic. The information letter informed the participants that they could use an interpreter in the interviews. Voluntariness, privacy, and confidentiality (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009) were stressed to all participants during the entire research process.

The value of doing good and inflicting no harm (see also National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009) was a core value throughout the research process. Especially at an early stage, when I was going to do interviews at the day care centre, the value was implemented: the questions that were designed by the project coordinator of the sub-project 6 in the INCLUD-ED project were for older children. I thought it was unethical to interview children with questions that were inappropriate for 4- to 7-year old children, as in other countries participating in the project the children were much older. I found it ethically inappropriate to confuse children and thought it was my ethical responsibility to contact the project leader and ask if we could modify the questions to consider the age of the children. We were permitted to do that and ended up with more

suitable research questions. The lesson learned: it is crucial to ethically reflect on the research design and avoid harm.

The value of justice was demonstrated in the research especially in the research design and implementation and was related to vulnerability (e.g., Pieper & Thomson, 2013). The aim was to bring forward the voices of immigrant children and parents, whose perspectives have traditionally been neglected and who have a vulnerable status in research. The methodology applied in the INCLUD-ED project (Articles I and II of this study) relied on active participation of all participants and the objective was to create shared meanings (Flecha, 2015).

One ethical dimension related to justice was power distribution (e.g., Mayall, 2000); I found it was crucial to focus on how to speak to children and parents, where the interviewer sits during an interview, how introductions are handled, and how the interviewer reacts to the issues children and parents raise. I had to be constantly aware of my own values, positions, and cultural and linguistic aspects that could affect the interview situation and power distribution. The reflection on the value of justice and on the premises of the INCLUD-ED methodology helped me in the implementation of an equal dialogue with the participants, not a dialogue about them (CREA, 2012).

In the data collection phase, one ethical challenge was that of responding to children's and parents' difficult life situations. When doing interviews, sometimes children or parents reported on unemployment, death, bullying and poverty. These situations involved ethical reflections on how to react, what to say and what to ask. I found it was critical to show empathy and really listen to what the interviewee has to say. It was a moment of trust and a sign that the atmosphere was a safe one in which to talk about difficult things (e.g., Harcourt & Conroy, 2011).

## **5.2 Methodological reflections**

The main contribution of this study has been that it has added to the body of knowledge on culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of inclusion and participation in the Finnish ECEC context. Nationally, the research is rather scarce; due to this research gap, the identification and development of inclusive and participatory pedagogy and services taking into account the perspectives and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, has not taken place.

Furthermore, when assessing the internal validity of this study, the strength of this study lies in the rather vast research data, which has been analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative method (Articles I and II) is articulated to be suitable and well-founded, because the aim was to study and interpret experiences through interviews. Furthermore, it matched the research questions (Patton, 2015, 1999). The strength of the quantitative method chosen for Article III was the large number of observations that contribute to a

generalization of the results. Although the limited number of participants for the research data in Articles I and II may hinder generalization, it must be noted that the data was gathered during four years through in-depth interviews that attempted to foster dialogue and grasp the experiences of the participants.

The other contributions of this study are related to the research process, which include publishing the research articles, which are part of this study, in international journals verifying that the research has been subjected to anonymous peer-review (Saracho, 2017). Additionally, the triangulation process (Article II) contributed to the credibility of this study; triangulation allowed a joint analysis through several cycles of interaction between researchers, theory and data using the benefits from both inductive and deductive approaches (Kováč & Spens, 2005). This triangulation process, which included two different data collection processes, expertise of two researchers and the use of multiple theoretical perspectives, contributed to the deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Another contribution of the study is the use of the Atlas.ti (Frieze, 2015) to manage qualitative interview data (Articles I and II). I was trained to use the software and I argue that Atlas.ti contributed positively to the high-quality data management, because I was able to manage a large amount of research data and make notes simultaneously.

When reflecting on the limitations of this study, one limitation is the research data of Articles I and II; the data was gathered during 2007–2010 so the first interviews were conducted 12 years ago. Therefore, the experiences of participants may be different if the interviews would be reconducted in today's ECEC. However, this limitation can also be a benefit: the time range offers a chance to reflect on the possible changes in the society and in the ECEC system. In 12 years, the ECEC and pre-primary curricula have changed; the concepts of participation and active agency have become central foci in the revised ECEC curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018), as have the social constructivist and socio-cultural theories (Kumpulainen, 2018). Furthermore, well-being and positive psychology are more emphasized in today's ECEC (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017); this in turn can also be seen in this study, which began from focusing on exclusion and risk factors.

Another limitation of this study is related to interview questions (Articles I and II), which were considered inappropriate for children under 7 years-old (see chapter 6.1). Although the questions were modified, I find that there should have been more questions to address participation and inclusion more deeply and to encompass the experiences more comprehensively.

As the objective of this study has been to study experiences, one might justly ask how Article III has studied the experiences of children; the observations were made by ECEC educators so the decision whether a child experienced participation was made by an educator. Therefore, this can be seen problematic and it is relevant to consider if the title of this study should have been something else. The starting point and basis of the research has been to see children as subjects that experience learning and are of interest to themselves as well as other children and adults (Greene & Hogan, 2005).

Another limitation relates to the chosen analysis method of Article I, which studied the perspectives of families: the content analysis may have omitted various discourses. In the future, it would be important to apply a narrative inquiry method or discourse analysis method. Additionally, this study does not include the experiences of ECEC educators, which is a clear limitation. Therefore, in the future, it would be important to study the experiences of ECEC educators on inclusion and participation to develop a more detailed analysis of the phenomenon. Moreover, it would be important to explore the ECEC learning environments to develop environments that enhance children's experiences of inclusion and participation.

### **5.3 Personal reflections**

I would like to consider my own position as a white, middle-class, Finnish-speaking adult researcher from a university, because reflecting on and understanding how these characteristics and my own life experiences might have had an impact on this study, is an important quality-factor in research (Berger, 2013). Particularly, when collecting data for the article I and II, my role in the research processes was as an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), as I did not belong to the group of children and families I was studying. Furthermore, during the first year of the research process, I did not have my own children, which may also have affected the research. However, the following three years of the research process, I had experiences of being a parent myself so I could relate to the participant parents. Although I was conducting the research as an outsider, not as an insider, I found that my position helped the children and their families to explain their experiences more fully (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Furthermore, I found it essential to stress to the children and families that I did not know the answers to the research questions and that they were the experts on the matter I was studying. The general sensation I construed from the families' narratives was that they were extremely flattered and grateful that someone wanted to study their own experiences. However, the hierarchical power imbalance (e.g., Mayall, 2002) and the language hierarchy between me and the parents, because I was the only one with fluent Finnish knowledge, cannot be dismissed.

Another aspect, which may have had an effect particularly on the writing of this summary, is my personal experience of living abroad and experiencing "otherness" and lacking language skills. Especially one experience with my older child's pre-primary group's teacher has helped to understand what it feels like to experience deficiency and incompetence: I had a meeting with the teacher who explained how my child had progressed and saw that he had a problem with drawing a human being. I tried to explain in my non-fluent French that my child is not interested in drawing human beings but is good at other tasks. In the end, because the teacher insisted that he needs to learn to draw a human being, I asked if the teacher has good advices how he could learn to draw (I did not want

to reveal that I was a kindergarten teacher myself), the teacher was astonished; she then began to draw a human being and instruct me how to draw. I experienced total humiliation; I remained silent and nodded to the teacher only when she asked if I had understood. This experience and many others during my stay abroad affirmed my personal approach towards seeing that despite diversities, we all want to experience inclusion and participation; furthermore, we all have funds of knowledge.

Another life-changing experience, which may have affected my research, is our family's return to Finland. This time, I knew the language, the society, the customs and I did not have the pressure to get to know new people but at the same time everything was strange. For me, moving back to Finland was not moving back home. For me, home was the other country in which I had lived for years. It took me a long time to create a new identity as I had to deal with criticality and marginality. I consider that this experience taught me to broaden my perspective on diversity, inclusion and participation.

## 6 RESULTS

The results will be presented by introducing the results of the three research articles in separate subchapters. All three articles, even though presented here separately, are interrelated and form an integrated examination of the phenomenon of culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of participation and inclusion in the Finnish ECEC. The results of these articles are summarized in Chapter 7 (Conclusions and discussion) to answer the general questions of this study to create a model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy, which identifies the essential elements in building and developing the inclusive and participatory practices. Table 2 presents the research questions of each article.

**Table 2.** Research questions connected to the study.

<b>The main research question of the entire study:</b> Which are the essential elements in building and developing inclusive and participatory ECEC practices?		
<b>Article 1.</b> Immigrant Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context	<b>Article 2.</b> Ethical Reflections of Interviewing Young Children: Opportunities and Challenges for Promoting Children's Inclusion and Participation	<b>Article 3.</b> Increasing Immigrant Children's Participation in the Finnish Early Childhood Education Context
<b>Research question:</b> Which ECEC practices enhance or hinder inclusion and participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families?	<b>Research questions:</b> What kind of ethical considerations exist when interviewing children in ECEC?  How can children's experiences of participation and inclusion in ECEC be promoted through ethical interviewing?	<b>Research question:</b> Which ECEC activities and practices increase culturally and linguistically diverse children's participation?

## **6.1 Culturally and linguistically diverse families' experiences of the Finnish ECEC practices**

The aim of my first article "*Immigrant parents' perspectives on early childhood education and care practices in the Finnish multicultural context*" (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016) was to study culturally and linguistically diverse families' perspectives on the Finnish inclusive ECEC practices. During the time that the research data was gathered and the article was written, the National Curriculum Guidelines (Stakes, 2005) and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (36/1973), earlier entitled the Child Day Care Act, were in force, as has been discussed earlier (see Chapter 3.1). For pre-primary education, the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010) was the regulating document, when the research data was gathered and when the article was written, the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) was in force. The Basic Education Act (628/1998) was the legislation in place regarding Finnish pre-primary education during the entire research process of the article.

During the time that I was writing the article, the migrant population had grown rapidly in Finland (European Migration Network, 2014), the migration wave of asylum seekers and refugees concerned i.e. the immigration authorities, general public and education, Finland (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016) and the number of migrant children in Finnish early childhood education services had increased especially in the Capital Region of Finland (Hiekkavuo, 2017). In addition, the number of second-generation children with Finnish citizenship, had increased (City of Helsinki Urban Facts, 2017). However, the research on culturally and linguistically diverse families' perspectives on the Finnish ECEC was scarce and therefore needed (Niemelä, 2015; Paavola, 2017). Extensive international research has suggested that ECEC centres may be the first place for families with immigrant backgrounds to interact daily and have contact with their new home countries (e.g., Tobin, Arzubiaga & Adair, 2013; Vesely, Ewaida & Kearney, 2013); therefore, the ECEC has a crucial role to play in inclusion (Crosnoe & Alsari, 2015; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011).

The research questions of this study were as follows: (1) What are the most important ECEC practices for families and (2) How do these practices help and support the families in their everyday life? The analysis of interviews showed that there were four themes that were essential for the families: (1) fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, (2) promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, (3) encouraging cooperative partnership and (4) providing support and individualized attention.

In general, the participant parents were extremely positive about the practices of the selected ECEC centre, which may result from the long-term experience and development work of the educators and directors with culturally and linguistically diverse families. However, the participants of this study also criticised some ECEC practices. The emergent themes found in the analysis will be introduced next.

### *Fostering dialogue and mutual understanding*

One of the emergent themes found in the analysis, was the concept of *fostering dialogue and mutual understanding*, which covered aspects, such as daily communication, the characteristics of the personnel related to dialogue and mutual understanding. The families appreciated the communication between families and the ECEC centre and were satisfied with the amount of information they received concerning the daily activities, field trips, and schedules. A noticeboard, written notes, parent meetings, questionnaires, discussions of children's individual ECEC plans and diaries were seen as central tools for communication and interaction.

The characteristics of ECEC personnel that were meaningful for families were the ability to listen to families and children, openness, accessibility, and the receptiveness to opposite opinions and points of view.

It was found that the families wanted to be aware of everything concerning their children so that the families would be able to discuss with the personnel the areas in which the children might need support at home. The importance of mutual understanding was stressed: the ECEC personnel and families had created a mutual understanding that included an exchange of information, reciprocity, agreement and mutual understanding (e.g., Tveit & Walseth, 2012). The latter helped in the shared dialogue that was part of a cooperation based on mutual trust and respect (e.g., Rouse, 2012). It needs to be noted that the dialogues between families and personnel were not always easy and involved controversial and challenging conversations and meetings. However, personnel's positive perspectives on diversity and their constructive practices of working with diverse families (see also Shuker & Cherrington, 2016) helped them to reach a mutual understanding.

The criticism towards the ECEC practices concerned scarce information on children's learning and development, as well as on conflicts between children; families wanted more detailed facts. Particularly, some families wanted to receive more specific information concerning their children's academic progress; this finding was also apparent in previous research (see e.g., Patel & Agbenyega, 2013; Tobin & Kurban, 2010). The play-based ECEC pedagogy (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014; Finnish National Board of Education, 2010; Stakes, 2005) may have been unfamiliar to the participant families of this study or another explanation may be that immigrant families emphasize academics.

### *Promoting linguistic and cultural diversity*

Another theme was *promoting linguistic and cultural diversity*. Families talked about the personnel's strong cultural competence, which was shown in practices that respected cultural and linguistic diversity. The ECEC centre's dual language and culture approach was seen as important: it had provided language and cultural support by the practices that included acknowledging and respecting



different religions, languages and cultures. For families, the encouragement of personnel for home language use was appreciated; they did not have to worry about their children losing their home language while also encouraging their children to learn the Finnish language. Therefore, ECEC centre's practice for using home language as a resource (Soltero-González, 2009) and regarding bilingualism as a mental asset (Kroll & Bialystok, 2013) was highly valued.

In the interviews, the parents discussed integration, separation and the need to belong and have a common culture. They mentioned that the ECEC centre had succeeded in successful adaptation in which integrative strategies had been used (see e.g., Berry, 2005). However, there was some criticism towards the ECEC personnel's inability to recognise families' cultures; some of the parents wanted religion to be included in the curriculum or that the children would be able or allowed to visit a church during the ECEC day. These results are in line with previous research (e.g., Kuusisto, Kallioniemi & Matilainen, 2014; Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016; Tobin & Kurban, 2010) that there is uncertainty on the implementation of religions and worldviews in Finnish ECEC.

The results show that the parents highly appreciated the ECEC centre's personnel, which included members of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, because they experienced that it had helped children to embrace diversity in their everyday lives and provided safety and gave them confidence. The parents mentioned that having personnel of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds had also helped in communication with guardians and their children. Furthermore, some parents suggested that it would be beneficial if the personnel who had diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds would assist Finnish families with learning from other cultures and reducing prejudice.

Having multicultural personnel was highly appreciated; the parents in this study felt that the multicultural personnel helped children understand each other and provided feelings of safety and confidence. Parents found the multicultural personnel to be helpful in communication; some of the parents emphasized that the multicultural personnel should also assist Finnish families with learning from other cultures and reducing prejudice (see e.g., Adair, 2015).

### *Encouraging cooperative partnership*

The results show that the families were very much aware of their roles in cooperation with the ECEC centre and of the positive effects of their active involvement in children's learning (see also, e.g., Ule, Živoder & du Bois-Reymond, 2015). In this cooperation, which parents regarded more as a partnership as stated in the previous Curriculum (Stakes, 2005), the parents experienced that the goals and decisions were made together in cooperation with the ECEC personnel. The families highlighted the individual ECEC plan as an important area in which they had an influence.

The families described the partnership as being open, fluent, appreciative, trusting and helpful; it allowed monitoring children's development and learning

together, as well as influencing decision-making. Although there were conflicting views between families and personnel, the families experienced that the personnel accepted their opinions and that they shared power (DeMulder & Stribling, 2012) existed.

Although the families were happy about the activities, parties, coffee mornings, parent meetings, excursions, discussions on individual ECEC plans, and questionnaires provided by the personnel, they also wanted to become more acquainted with other families in order to learn from others' experiences or helping with conflict resolution between children (see e.g., Issari & Karayianni, 2013). Furthermore, it was found that the families were generally satisfied with the opportunities to participate in the activities of the ECEC centre but some families were bewildered at the thought of engaging more actively in the activities (e.g., Chan, 2011).

Although the results showed that parents were generally satisfied with the amount of participation, some parents would have liked to participate more in test situations, activities in the ECEC centre, decision-making (e.g. Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011) and planning the centre's curriculum (e.g., Rouse, 2014).

### *Providing support and individualized attention*

The results show that the families had experienced much individualized attention, help and support for children that had a positive effect on the well-being of families. They stressed that it positively changed their lives when having problems with their child or personnel or needing special resources (e.g., special assistant, speech therapist, interpreter or psychologist) or guidance with finding work or attending courses. Those families who did not stress support as such, highlighted the feeling that they would have been able to speak freely about troubling issues, if they had occurred and knew that they would receive help from the personnel.

Furthermore, some family members stressed that the ECEC personnel had increased their self-confidence and active agency and improved their quality of life. The families described the personnel as friendly, positive, caring, encouraging, attentive and helpful. It was shown that the caring attitude of the personnel was experienced by the empowerment of families and educators (see also, Paavola, 2017; Swick, 2007; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

The parents highlighted the professional skills of the ECEC personnel, as well as the high-quality activities and their children's positive attitudes and willingness to come daily to the ECEC centre. They were also satisfied with the resources they had received: they mentioned interpretation, speech and language training and speech teacher services. Additionally, multiculturalism, consistency and a high adult-to-child ratio were experienced as positive and important elements. Moreover, they found it helpful that the elementary school, where their children were going to enrol after the pre-primary year, was in the same building as the ECEC centre, because the families felt that it had a positive effect on children's learning, well-being and feeling of security.

The results showed that all the parents appreciated their children's learning and development. They had experienced pleasure in their children's learning to read, write, do mathematics, develop social skills and the ability to play with others and integrate to a group. They also acknowledged their children's new skills in Finnish language, music, physical education crafts. Finally, they had achieved competence in dressing, eating, and concentrating on their studies. They felt that their children enjoyed themselves and felt comfortable at the ECEC centre; the families named friends, the excitement of learning, drawing, colouring, swimming and engaging in physical education and outdoor play as important activities for their children. Furthermore, they mentioned that the cooperation between ECEC personnel and families positively affected children's well-being in the ECEC centre. The parents appreciated learning and development not only for their children's readiness for primary schools (e.g., Tobin, Arzubiega & Adair, 2013) but also for the consideration of their general well-being.

## **6.2 Ethical interviewing of ECEC children for promoting children's inclusion and participation**

The research objective of the second article "*Ethical Reflections of Interviewing Young Children: Opportunities and Challenges for Promoting Children's Inclusion and Participation*" (Lastikka & Kangas, 2017) was to identify and describe ethical considerations in interviewing young children in ECEC and to explore how ethical interviewing can elicit children's experiences of participation and inclusion.

The background for this study emerged from the notion of the lack of methodological and ethical research concerning methods of interviewing children (e.g., Solberg, 2014) to promote their participation and inclusion in ECEC. The topic was regarded as crucial, because when children are seen as active participants, who are *taking part in and contributing actively to a situation, an event, a process or an outcome* (James & James, 2012), new ethical dilemmas and responsibilities become apparent (e.g., Christensen & Prout, 2013).

The results that emerged from the analysis were that there are five enabling elements (opportunities) and five restricting elements (challenges) for engaging children in ethical research. Through the identified challenges, effective research practices were identified to overcome these challenges. The opportunities, challenges and effective research practices will be introduced next.

The identified opportunities included the following elements: supporting to show emotions, respecting diversity and special needs, enhancing children's competence and agency, stimulating humour, playfulness and imagination and empowering children. It was found that through ethical interviewing it was possible to bring forward chances for meaningful encounters and positive feelings of empowerment, competence and agency (see also, e.g., Einarsdóttir,

2007; Kretz, 2014). When creating a meaningful interview encounter with a child, appropriate questions, genuine listening and interest of the researcher, as well as embracing the value of diversity and equality in the research relationship were found to be crucial. Additionally, the significance of treating each child with respect and acknowledging that everyone has his or her own knowledge, skills and abilities, was determined to be important so that the researcher encouraged the children to show these.

Furthermore, humour, playfulness and imagination were shown to be important when interviewing children about their experiences of participation and inclusion; through humour, it was possible to not only create a relaxed and open atmosphere but also talk about children's different experiences which sometimes were considered difficult and challenging from the researcher's perspective (e.g., Loizou, 2005; Roos & Rutanen, 2014).

The identified challenges for children were building trust, identifying a difference between real experiences and imagination, responding to difficult life situations, listening attentively and addressing power distribution. First, building trust between a child and a researcher, as well as creating a warm and encouraging environment were found to be essential in completing significant longer interviews. If the child seemed to be nervous, the researcher initiated a discussion or suggested a playful activity. Furthermore, the study showed that in the interviews, some children understood the interview as testing, not as the researcher's genuine willingness to hear children's own experiences. There were also children who remained totally silent or only nodded and some children seemed to find the interview situation uncomfortable.

Another challenge was the identification of difference between children's real experiences and imagination: it was found that for ethical reasons, children's descriptions were never doubted and were written or transcribed as the children reported them and considered as true narratives.

One identified challenge was responding to the difficult life experiences children told to the researcher; these experiences involved unemployment, death, prison, bullying and lack of money. It was found that experiences were described without visible sorrow, unease or upset and sometimes included humour and positive insights (e.g., Solberg, 2014).

In relation to the challenge of listening attentively, it was found that listening presented a challenge to the interview process: it required that the researchers be constantly attentive, keep eye contact with the children and make supporting signs and give positive feedback, such as nodding, smiling or responding verbally by saying, "I understand", "I see" or "OK". Additionally, it was found that remaining silent and not commenting was sometimes challenging for the researchers. This was the case especially with the children who seemed to be shy when the challenge was to give time to these children.

The power distribution emerged from the data as a demanding ethical challenge. Although the researchers highlighted to the children that the children are the experts of their own lives and only they knew the answers, there were situations, which needed critical ethical consideration. It was found that the researcher must reflect on power relations and his or her own actions and

expressions repeatedly. The found solutions for breaking the power imbalance were that the researcher must to emphasise that he/she does not know the right answer but the child is the expert, as well as that the researcher also wants to share his or her own life experiences or personal information with the child.

### **6.3 Culturally and linguistically diverse children's participation in the Finnish ECEC**

The third article *“Increasing immigrant children's participation in the Finnish early childhood education context”* (Arvola, Lastikka & Reunamo, 2017) aimed to study quantitatively which daily activities in ECEC have the most positive effects on immigrant children's participation in order to study closely what occurs in the everyday ECEC practices and how immigrant children's participation is promoted. There was a need for this study: in the Finnish ECEC, the lack of research on immigrant children's participation was evident (Arvola, Reunamo & Kyttälä, 2017) and participation in the Finnish ECEC was found to be unequal (Vuorisalo, 2013). Moreover, a connection between ECEC practices and policy understanding about migrant children of transnational backgrounds in terms of their social, cultural and historical background was relatively unknown (Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Kirova, 2010).

Results from previous research show that newcomer migrant children experience social competition, relational aggression and struggles for position (Kalkman, Hoppersted & Valenta, 2017) and that friendships and relationships with teachers are crucial for migrant children (Duci et al., 2015). During the research process of this study, children's participation had become a topical paradigm that was actualized in the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). Therefore, the aim of the third article of this study was formed to study the ECEC practices that are important for culturally and linguistically diverse children and consequently could enhance their well-being, inclusion and participation.

Four results emerged from the analysis: (1) immigrant children's participatory actions correlate positively with involvement and therefore with learning; (2) immigrant children's participatory actions correlate positively with positive emotions; (3) immigrant children's participatory action relates to peer relations with a group of children or another child and (4) role play is positively correlated with participatory action. Next, these results will be discussed in more detail.

#### *Children's participatory action and involvement*

The first result, which had statistically the most significant correlation, was that children's participatory action is associated with their involvement and deepened their level of being included in activities. Involvement focuses on the extent to

which children are operating their full capacities, and whether a child is focused, engaged and interested in activities. Because involvement is highly related to learning (Laevers, 2003), these results show that those children who are highly involved as having a participatory role in action, are motivated, fascinated and consequently learning (Laevers, 2016). The state of involvement has been characterized as a state of flow (Csikszentmihayli, 1979), which in addition to concentration, strong motivation and fascination, includes total openness to stimuli, intensity in perceptual and cognitive functioning, satisfaction and energy. For young children, this happens generally in play (Laevers, 2016; 2005); the same results were also found in this study. Consequently, the results indicate that for immigrant children, participatory action may be the most meaningful, motivational and fascinating of ECEC activities.

#### *Children's participatory action and peer relations*

The second finding that had the second statistically significant correlation, was that participatory action is related to peer relations with a group of children or another child. This aligns with the previous research in the Finnish ECEC context where it has been found that the most positive experiences for children in ECEC are connected with good friends (Puroila, Estola & Syrjälä, 2012; Virkki, 2015); negative aspects were related to children's separateness from adults, exclusion from peer relationships and lack of respect as a subject (Puroila, Estola & Syrjälä, 2012). In relation to inclusion, peer relations have been found important (Corsaro, 2014, 2011; Madureira Ferreira, Mäkinen & de Souza Amorim, 2018). Therefore, the result of our study indicates that for immigrant children, other children play a significant role in participation and ECEC activities.

#### *Children's participatory action and positive emotions*

The third finding, which had the third strongest correlation, was that immigrant children's participatory actions were positively associated with positive emotions and that participation was emotionally rewarding. The positive emotions correlated with participation were surprise, alertness, curiosity and excitement, as well as happiness, joy and contentment. The link between learning and well-being is clear; it has been generally recognized that well-being is correlated with children's positive and confident engagement with their environment, which in turn have a positive effect on utilising learning opportunities (Mashford-Scott, Church & Tayler, 2012). Our result of the importance of positive emotions for immigrant children's participation confirms that participation is meaningful for immigrant children.

#### *Children's participatory action and role play*

The fourth result that was found was that for immigrant children, role play is positively associated with participatory action. Play has been found to be intrinsically motivating, including creativity and imagination and results in a meaningful experience for children (Broström, 2017). It also contributes to children's social skills and creativity and is important for children's well-being when supporting emotional contentment and feeling more in control of their lives (Corsaro, 2011). Role play particularly has been proven useful as an instrument for preserving cultural group identities while still creating a shared culture (Kirova, 2010). Migrant children can use particular events in their role play to explore cultural borders (Kalkman & Clark, 2017).

## 7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This licentiate study has explored culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of participation and inclusion in the Finnish ECEC context in order to deepen the understanding of inclusive and participatory practices in Finnish ECEC pedagogy, which takes into account the diversity of families and children. The general aim has been to create a model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy that identifies the essential elements in building and developing the inclusive and participatory practices.

There has been a call for the research, because despite the increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse children and families in the Finnish ECEC services, the research on their experiences has been lacking. Furthermore, although the Finnish inclusive and participatory pedagogy has been developed and received a considerable amount of research interest, the current evidence lacks the experiences on participation and inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families and on a meaningful pedagogy for them.

In this study, the theoretical framework has encompassed inclusion and participation as central concepts grounded in the international declarations, policies, reforms and recommendations (European Commission, 1996; UNESCO, 2006, 1994; United Nations, 1989, 1948). Additionally, the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017) and the Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) have been explored, because these are the regulating documents in today's ECEC, both highlighting participation and inclusion. The Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes, 2005) and the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (National Board of Education, 2010) have also been addressed, because these curricula have been in use during the time of the research process of this study and therefore have offered frameworks and tools for the analysis.

The theoretical frameworks of this study, the strength-based approach, funds of knowledge and a socio-cultural perspective, have been used, because the aspects of children's and families' strengths, knowledge and active participation relate to each other and have been considered important in studying children's and families' unique voices that have been unheard in the Finnish ECEC.

When reflecting on the research results against the declarations, reforms, recommendations and curricula referred in this study, it is possible to see at a macro-level that the results support the value of inclusion, which is the underlying value in the described documents. It manifests as a value of belonging; in practice that means a child's unique voice is recognized, valued and heard (Felder, 2018).

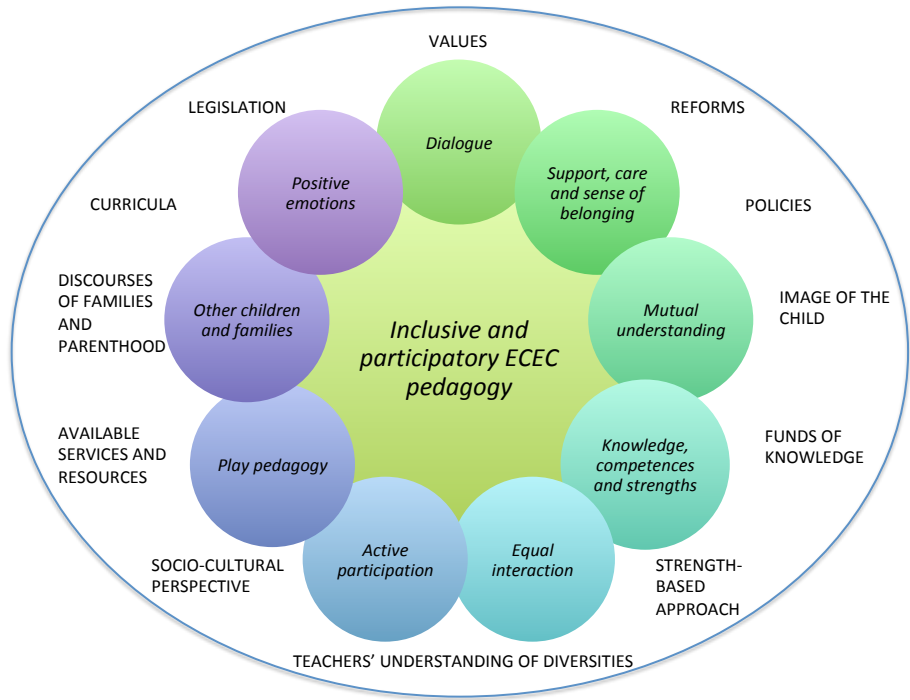
This study has revealed that for the families of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the most important ECEC practices in relation to inclusion and



participation were fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, encouraging cooperative partnership and receiving support and individualized attention. In relation to children, this study found that children’s participatory actions correlated positively with involvement, positive emotions, peer relations and play.

Additionally, the results of this study indicate that through ethical interviewing, meaningful encounters and positive feelings of empowerment, competence and agency are initiated. Ethical interviewing includes appropriate questions, the researcher’s ability to genuinely listen and show interest and support and actualize the values of diversity and equality in the research relationship. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of showing respect and recognizing each child’s knowledge, abilities and skills. Importantly, for children, humour, playfulness and imagination played a significant role when they were interviewed about their experiences of participation and inclusion.

This holistic model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy (Figure 2) summarizes the results of this study.



**Figure 2.** Model of inclusive and participatory ECEC pedagogy

The model has two levels: the macro-level, which includes the elements on a large scale influencing the inclusionary and participatory ECEC practices. The elements discussed in this study include the ECEC and pre-primary education

curricula, reforms and policies, values and the image of the child. In addition, teachers' understanding of diversities, discourses of families and parenthood, available resources and services along with the theoretical frameworks of the strength-based approach, funds of knowledge and a socio-cultural perspective have been important parts of the study.

The micro-level has been developed based on the research results of this study; the elements found to be meaningful for the culturally and linguistically diverse children and families in the Finnish ECEC are the following: (1) Dialogue; (2) Support, care and a sense of belonging; (3) Mutual understanding; (4) Play pedagogy; (5) Promotion of knowledge, competence and strengths; (6) Equal interaction; (7) Active participation; (8) Other children and families and (9) Positive emotions.

The results show that it is fundamental that a pedagogy that is based on children's and families' strengths, knowledge and active participation, is empowering and meaningful for culturally and linguistically diverse children. This aligns with other research on participatory pedagogy (e.g., Berthelsen et al., 2009; Kangas, 2016; Virkki, 2015), the ethics of participatory pedagogy (Pascal & Bertram, 2012) and inclusive pedagogy (e.g., Bartolo et al., 2016; Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016; Pascal & Bertram, 2018).

Therefore, this study suggests that in ECEC, children and families should be seen as having "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005), and the ECEC practices and pedagogy should build on the strength-based approach (Dunst, Trivette & Mott, 1994; Powell et al., 1997); that is, personnel should not treat them as Others or as marginalised, and stigmatized persons whose matters do not concern "us", the majority. Moreover, the socio-cultural perspective (Berthelsen et al., 2009; Corsaro, 2011; Rogoff, 2007) applied in this study situates the child as an active and equal agent that produces knowledge with others. The utilization of these theoretical frameworks has guided me through this study and given the structure with which to build an argument that the combination of the strength-based, funds of knowledge and socio-cultural approaches promotes an inclusive and participatory pedagogy for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in positive education particularly in the Finnish special education context indicating that it correlates positively with a decrease in prejudices and an increase in eagerness to care for each other (e.g., Vuorinen, Erikivi & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2018). In the future, it would be important to further study the effects of strength-based pedagogy on culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences on their well-being, sense of belonging and security and social cohesion. It would also be interesting to explore how the "funds of knowledge" approach is connected to how ECEC teachers link the curriculum contents with children's and families' experiences and lives.

Another important result of this study is the importance of dialogue along with the relevance of individualized support and care. The ability to listen and the competence to discuss controversial issues were found noteworthy. This suggests that recognition, respect and caring are fundamental for both children

and families of diverse cultural and linguistical backgrounds (see also, e.g., Paavola, 2017). This is in line with previous research that the affective approach recognises structural injustices and personal histories and reconstructs intercultural pedagogy towards a sense of belonging and encouragement (Layne & Lipponen, 2016). In relation to this, active participation seems to be one significant element in a child's experiencing a sense of belonging (see also, Leggett & Ford, 2016) and inclusion (Pascal & Bertram, 2018). Therefore, in the future, more emphasis should be put on promoting individualized and caring ECEC relationships among children, families and educators.

There are some critical aspects that need further discussion. First, as some of the parents of this study had experienced that the ECEC personnel did not recognize families' different cultures; some of the parents wanted religion to be included in the curriculum or wanted that children would have had possibilities to visit a church or a mosque (see also Kuusisto, Kallioniemi & Matilainen, 2014; Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012; Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). Moreover, they wanted to participate more in test situations, activities, decision-making, planning the curriculum, getting to know better other families and said that they wished that they had received more information on their children's academic progress (see also, e.g., Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; Patel & Agbenyega, 2013; Rouse, 2014). These results suggest that more effort should be made not only to inform culturally and linguistically diverse families of the details of the Finnish ECEC pedagogy but also to invite families to increase their participation in the activities of ECEC centres. Perhaps today's digitalization could contribute some solutions: family members could benefit from listening to podcasts of the elements of the Finnish ECEC provided in different languages.

Additionally, one way to increase positive family participation could be the organization of shared Storycrafting moments (Riihelä, 2001; Karlsson, 2014; Karlsson, Lähteenmäki & Lastikka, 2019) in which children and their family members could tell stories of their own. This might promote reciprocal and dialogic learning (e.g., CREA, 2012; Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011; Karlsson, Lastikka & Vartiainen, 2018), as speaking is an essential part of participation and the use of power and positioning oneself in ECEC (Vuorisalo, 2013; Vuorisalo et al., 2015). Therefore, finding practices that could promote viewing everyone's skills, resources and cultures as valuable in learning could be beneficial.

In Finland, the current societal and political attitude towards minorities is challenging: hate speech, popularisation, extremism and racism concern particularly immigrants (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018b; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; YLE, 2017). Hate speech has been defined as one of the worst human rights problems in Finland (UN Human Rights Council, 2017). In the Finnish ECEC context, it has been found that immigrant children do not bully others more than the native Finnish children but they are victimized more frequently than the native Finns, and the most common form of psychological bullying is exclusion from a peer group (Repo, 2015). As the results of this study suggest, in the future, it would be beneficial to stress ECEC practices that promote a trusting and empowering environment where

positive emotions and encouragement exist not only between children and educators exist but also between educators and families.

Another challenge in Finnish society is the deficit thinking about parenthood: the key message of a recently published report (The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, 2019) is that parents experience shame and they are being embarrassed by official services. The results of this study imply that all parents, also culturally and linguistically diverse parents, want encouragement, positive feedback and praise as being good parents. Consequently, this relates to the training of ECEC educators, who have a key role in encountering families (see also, Hiitola, Anis & Turtiainen, 2018). The need for the development of Finnish teacher training has been mentioned (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016; Layne, 2016) to face the new challenges of immigration and gain a better understanding of what is required in teacher training. Furthermore, developing teachers' intercultural competencies, particularly intercultural sensitivity, has been recognized as a specific objective of teacher training (Rissanen, Kuusisto & Kuusisto, 2016). The contribution of this study to teacher training and in-service training is in providing perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families showing what elements in the ECEC services and pedagogy are hindering or enhancing inclusion and participation.

One major limitation of this study and in the developed model is the lack of ECEC teachers' experiences, because one central element in an inclusive approach is teachers' methods (Loreman, 2017). Moreover, the participant parents of this study stressed the importance of culturally and linguistically diverse ECEC personnel. Therefore, in the future, it would be crucial to study more in detail what kind of pedagogical practices the ECEC personnel use with culturally and linguistically diverse children and particularly to examine the practices used by multicultural ECEC personnel.

This study has gone some way towards understanding culturally and linguistically diverse children's and families' experiences of the Finnish ECEC and provides some implications for developing participatory and inclusive ECEC pedagogy. Reflecting on the results against the larger picture of the society and today's world, this study calls for fostering social cohesion and critical reflection on how ECEC services and pedagogy could better contribute to not 'Othering' culturally and linguistically diverse children and families but rather creating mutual understanding and cohesive practices; the 'Othering', which is said to be a problem of the 21st century, denies inclusion and membership in a society (Powell & Menendian, 2016), should be researched more in the future. Finally, it is relevant to ask if the elements found in this study should be applied in a pedagogy for all children and families in the ECEC services.



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